

The following is the text to Mike Jameson's emphatic speech to Metro Council on Thursday in which he passionately calls for a public meeting to discuss McNeely Pigott & Fox's public relations contract regarding the proposed Music City Center.

“I would ask that the Metro Council participate in the discussion with Mr. Ryan to the extent that they're interested. In fairness to Mr. Ryan I want to disclose in advance the general topics that I'll hope to cover in that meeting.

“The first and foremost being how and why a contract originally limited to \$75,000 is now at nearly half a million dollars, and that's without all the invoices having been produced as far as I can tell.

“The second issue is, what is it that MDHA anticipated that the PR firm that was retained with the moneys that this Council allocated, what is it that Phil Ryan anticipated that they were going to be doing on behalf of the convention center?

“I've read some comments in recent media by members of the public relations firm that they claim they were not lobbying, and not trying to influence the Council in any way. All I know is that as a member of Council, I received multiple e-mails that were sent to apparently a large number of members of the public, that said things along the lines of an April 29 e-mail, 'We'll need lots of support at these meetings,' meaning the Metro Council meetings, 'Please express your support for the Music City Center to your Council members on local blogs and on the comments section of the news articles. E-mail after e-mail, all of which were authored or produced by the PR firm, as acknowledged at the bottom of the e-mails.

“The charter has defined lobbying as anything to influence the legislative process, and that is exactly what that process is. It also appears from these invoices that we got, and these were about an inch-and-a-half thick, that these e-mails were sent to a skewed audience, a limited audience of people that were identified as supporters from Facebook and Twitter accounts and then compiled, as their invoices say, as a list of supporters. So even when the e-mails are neutrally phrased, 'Come to this meeting, or come to this debate,' they are only being sent to supporters of the convention center.

“They were repeatedly sending out blast e-mails to encourage people to come to Metro Council meetings to express their support for the convention center, enticing them with things like free ice cream, free T-shirts. What that meant was that before the Council voted on these significant pieces of pre-convention center decisions, like whether to spend \$75 million on land, we walked a gauntlet of a chamber filled with people who had been brought here and would create the impression there was mass support for this because they had been encouraged by e-mails sent to this limited universe.

“There are indications in the invoices themselves, despite the PR firm's indications they weren't lobbying, there was a reference for example March 24, 2009, 'Meeting with lobbyists at Mayor's office.' The invoices also depict a series of events where members of the PR firm would add blog entries, apparently anonymously, without disclosing to us

that they were writing on behalf of a public relations firm hired by MDHA to promote the convention center.

“And lastly it appears that the PR firm ghost-wrote editorials written by leading citizens of the city. And when I read those editorials and think I’m reading the thought processes of our leading citizens, it turns out they were actually written by this PR firm.

“I read this morning that one of the partners in the PR firm said plainly that the firm did not help write Dean’s speeches. If I just read a few entries from the invoices. April 3, 2009 — final edits to mayor’s Council presentation. March 24, 2009 — develop mayor’s talking points. October 14, 2008 — updates to mayor’s speech regarding MCC project. October 13, 2008 — MCC speech rehearsal.

“And the last thing, and I will close Mr. pro tem, with one lingering concern, and that is the letter that was issued yesterday by the mayor’s office initially [I] was grateful that they were suspending the contract with this particular PR firm. And it indicates that the finance department essentially will review, investigate all of the invoices. And the thing that deeply concerns me about this, I guess is summarized in a quote from one of the members of the PR firm in the paper this morning where he said, ‘Our meetings with the finance department were to update everyone on the project, review revenue collection figures and expenses, discuss upcoming projects and review the most effective ways to present this information to the public.’

“If they’re reviewing the expenses weekly, the PR is meeting with the finance department members weekly, and reviewing the expenses — at first why a PR firm is reviewing these expenses on a weekly basis is a mystery to me — the finance department knew this was going on. Every week, every week at a minimum they had personal meetings in addition to letters, in addition to phone calls and e-mails, and they knew that these guys were charging us \$285 an hour. And it’s too late for them to say, ‘Oh my gosh! They’re gambling in Casablanca! We better investigate!’ They knew! And with all due respect, when there is financial impropriety in the hen house, we shouldn’t appoint the fox to be the auditor.

“And I want to request of Mr. Ryan, of Mr. Riebeling, of the mayor, and of this Council that we have three better options. We have appointed an independent auditor, we created that recently, who has a staff who’s capable of doing an independent audit. Secondly, this Council itself has investigatory powers with subpoena powers to do the audit ourselves. And if neither of those is plausible or politically realistic, then at least we should ask that when the finance department conducts its investigation, that the Council gets a full accounting, as well as a full accounting of all predevelopment activities.

“And if I’ve got 60 more seconds Mr. pro tem... I just want to say to my colleagues that are seated here, this is our half-way point this term. I’ve got two years left. I know after this, and after the PR firm that I’ve indicted, I know my career is over if it wasn’t already. But I just want to beg you for the next two years when we consider a project that’s going to cost \$1 billion for this city, at a time when we can’t meet Metro budgets and we’re

letting people go, I'm just asking you that when you sit your butts in these chairs, that you do it unfettered by inappropriate influence.”

[I hope you set aside the fact that you're dealing with a PR firm that threw a fund-raiser for you as they did for me or contributed money to your campaign and consider what's in the best interests of the city.]

Mike Jameson, speech to Metro Council, Aug. 6, 2009