TO: Board of Managers, Riley-Purgatory-Bluff Creek Watershed District

FROM: Terry Jeffery, administrator

RE: IT Services and Microsoft Entra

DATE: December 7, 2022

On December 31, 2022, our agreement with ImagineIT is set to expire. Based upon our experience with this provider, our limited IT needs, and the tools available to us through Microsoft 365 (MS365), I recommend that we do not enter into an agreement for monthly IT services with a third-party vendor.

CURRENT VENDOR STATUS

The district spends, on average, $1,759.60 per month for third-party IT services from ImagineIT. To date we have submitted 46 tickets. Of these tickets, 35 of them were for issues related to MS365 that had to go through our IT vendor because they administer our licenses. Those issues were handled internally prior to entering into an agreement with our IT vendor. Eight of the tickets were to set up computers with the vendor's remote access software. The only other tickets submitted were for the purchase of two laptops and for assistance with discovering and accessing our second WiFi port.

We were able to find considerably less expensive computers, with the same specifications, direct from manufacturers than through our IT vendor – on the order of 45% less expensive. In an effort to remedy the second access port, staff located the original vendor, the physical location of the port, and provided this information to our IT vendor. They were unable to address the issue and we still do not have access to the second port. We will work with the original vendor and Lumen to resolve the issue.

The district does not have a server so IT services are limited to nine laptops, one desktop, and six iPads. The reliability of computers and the services provided through MS365 result in very few hardware and data storage and operational issues, none of which could not be handled either directly by the affected staff or working with the computer manufacturer or software vendor.

AVAILABLE SERVICES

Microsoft has a suite of comprehensive cloud security applications that can be purchased for $9/month/user. These include the following:

1. Microsoft Defender for Cloud and Cloud Based Apps – analyzes, evaluates, and mitigates attack paths and vulnerabilities of cloud-based data and applications.
2. Microsoft Entra Permissions Management – allows for setting different permissions, multiple step verification, and monitoring of permissions and potential permission risks.

protect. manage. restore.

3. Azure Network Security – configures and manages a firewall across our virtual network and for our web applications.

In addition, we have a customer representative with Lumen and Verizon. Once the district is enrolled in the Microsoft Entra security, we will have a customer representative through Microsoft as well.

The district has purchased several portable, 1TB external hard drives so staff can back up information regularly. Finally, through the League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust, the District has cyber security insurance.

I have discussed this with staff, and they agree that we have the abilities and resources necessary to make a third-party IT vendor redundant and an unnecessary expenditure of tax dollars.

Staff will work with SRF staff, Kelly Spitzley, a library scientist by training, to develop a standardized filing system and nomenclature. This is anticipated to be two or three hours of consultant time with staff implementing any changes proposed.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
By utilizing existing Microsoft security features, the district can save an average of $1,582.60/month ($1,759.60 - $121 for MS365 licenses - $56 for security options). There will be some additional staff time involved but much of this will be spent on tasks we are already performing, even having an IT vendor. For the reasons stated above, it is my recommendation that the district discontinue retaining IT services and not solicit additional quotes.